Graphic Design Basics

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Learning Goals

1. Why Graphic Design matters
2. Understand the basic principles of design layout
3. Create a layout for a mock-event poster and iterate for social media push

Total Estimated Time: 2 hours

Study

I. Review Examples - What is graphic design and why does it matter? (15 minutes)

Designers are responsible for making text and complex data more compelling and easier to digest. This doesn't just mean they try to make things look "cool;" they use typography, imagery and graphics to improve communication. Take a look through the following design company websites and try to differentiate between the wide range of visual aesthetics they use. Pay attention to how they use graphic design elements (fonts, colors, imagery) in different ways depending on the client.

- Random Embassy (http://www.randomembassy.com)
  - Small-scale, Philly-based design firm focussing on art and non-profit institutions

- 160 over 90 (http://160over90.com/)
  - Large-scale, Philly-based design agency with A-list clients in sports and higher-ed)

You probably noticed quite a range in the graphic design projects on these websites. There's a reason for this diversity. Every company/client is trying to tell its own story. Just as

we vary the style of our prose according to the genre in which we are writing (e.g. a research paper is very different from a humorous poem), so too must designers tailor their visual communication according to the needs of each project. A classical, serif font (like **Times New Roman**) may communicate stateliness and longevity and an aversion to risk-taking. **Comic sans** (a notorious sans-serif font) is popular for design aimed at young children, but it can also register as hopelessly "out of touch" to young adult audiences. Design layout functions in a similar way. A crowded, but well laid-out, page can be used to convey a sense of excitement and youthful energy whereas a spare, center-aligned page tends to convey formality.

In order to understand better some of the decisions designers make, look through the following tips for how to deal 10 common graphic design elements. These before-and-after examples will also give you a sense of the many ways design elements can be used to increase the legibility of information for audiences.

- [10 tips for designing effective visual communication](#)

II. Tutorial - Learning the basics of graphic design- Layout (45 minutes)

All design starts with a basic problem: how to present information so others will be compelled to learn more. In the following tutorial you will learn the basics of graphic design layout. Layout is a crucial element of graphic design because, no matter the medium of your visual communication (poster, magazine, website, social media post), it all comes down to how you arrange your message in a rectilinear frame.

As you go through this tutorial, take notes on the principles of graphic design layout. You will be able to test your understanding of these "rules" (and even your ability to break them) in the next section.

- Visit [lynda.brynmawr.edu](#) and sign in with your BMC credentials.
- Navigate to the tutorial [Learning Graphic Design: Layout](#). Watch the tutorial; you may skip the final section in chapter 3, which focuses on putting together a magazine article.

Sandbox

III. Activity 1 - Design a poster for a Digital Scholarship event (20 minutes)

Goal:

To become familiar with the elements of design, you will use a free, online graphic design app to create a compelling poster advertising an upcoming digital scholarship event at the college. Be sure that the tone of your visual communication matches the tone of the event - and encourages others to attend!

- Sign up for a free account on Canva.com.
- Using a template from Canva.com, create a poster advertising a new "community of learning" about the programming language R at Bryn Mawr College. Be sure to choose a poster that is well-suited to the topic.
- A big photograph or intriguing graphic can be an excellent way to attract attention to your poster. Search the web for a photo or graphic to add to your poster. Remember, the photograph should not only pique interest, it also has to help further explain what the event is about.
    - In Google, you can do an image search and use the "Tools" panel to filter for "usage rights" in order to find an image that you are free to use in your poster
    - Unsplash - free, do-whatever-you-want image archive
- Draw your text from the initial email that went out advertising the event, however do not simply create a poster version of the email. Instead, edit the text down to what is essential. Try to use graphics or images to *show* rather than spell out what R programming is (remember, they will learn more about what R is at the event).
    - Consider modifying the text by adding a catchy headline
- Initial email text and event details:

    Do you work with spatial data like maps and architectural plans, or geographical data from an archaeological project? Does your research involve networks, such as social connections between artistic communities or trade networks spanning the ancient world? Are you interested in analyzing text corpora, in English or another language? If you answered "yes" to any of these, R could be a useful research tool for you! R is a simple but powerful language used for both statistical analysis and data visualization – that is, exploring and evaluating data as well as creating beautiful graphs, maps, or other visual representations.

    Please join our learning community, which is open to all faculty, staff, and graduate students as we learn and explore R together. At our first meeting, we will consider where our individual research interests overlap and develop a plan that will address everyone's personal learning goals. This will be followed by a very brief "sandbox" session to introduce R through a fun, interactive tutorial.

    The first session will be held on April 7th, from 1-2 PM in the Digital Media and Collaboration Lab on the main floor of Carpenter. Please contact (studentR@brynmawr.edu) for more information!

IV. Activity 2 - Iterate your design for social media (10 minutes)

Goal:

Using Canva's library of social media templates, iterate versions of your poster design to increase interest in your event.

- Create a teaser for your event to share on Instagram and another for Facebook.
  - Remember, be bold! Don't just resize your image/graphic and adjust the frame. Draw attention to the event by introducing new elements, but be sure to reference something from your original poster so your audience can recognize that everything is of a piece. And don't forget to edit down your text - an Instagram post is much smaller than poster hanging in the dorm.
- Create a second Facebook post graphic to use after the event, to provide information from the event for those who could not attend.

Share

V. Reflection - What's wrong with "bad" design? (5 minutes)

While bad design isn't necessarily going to hurt anyone, it can affect interest in your project either by turning people away or simply by failing to attract notice. Search "bad graphic design" or check out the subreddit https://www.reddit.com/r/CrappyDesign/. Examples of *really* bad design are everywhere--and rather humorous.

- In small groups, discuss other examples of "bad" graphic design that you've seen around campus. What is bad about these designs? What are the consequences for the events they are meant to advertise?

VI. Group Critique (20 minutes)

In groups, share your designs for the R community of learning event. Critique is a crucial part of the design process because it allows others to respond to your design in order to reveal what is working and what needs improvement.

- Take turns explaining your designs and the reasoning behind the various elements you included. Be sure to use the design vocabulary you learned today.
  - Typography, Iconography, Call-outs, Negative space, Layout, Color
- Using the comments you receive from your peers, write a **flog** entry about how you would go about improving your design.

VII. Reflection - Why design matters to Digital Scholarship (5 minutes)

In an era of visual overload, designers and marketers estimate that *if* they can attract your attention, they have at most 5 seconds to try and keep hold of it. Design can therefore be as important as written and verbal forms of communication--oftentimes a good design can compel you to learn more. Still, not everything needs to be graphically designed. A research

paper, for example, tests one's ability to write a clear and coherent argument. The addition of graphic icons and typography can't help--or hide--a poorly structured essay.

In small groups, discuss the following questions about why graphic design matters to digital scholarship:

- If one of the aims of digital scholarship is to increase access to dense academic research, how might design help in this process?
- When is it important to focus on other aspects of a project and when might a project benefit from careful thinking about its visual communication?